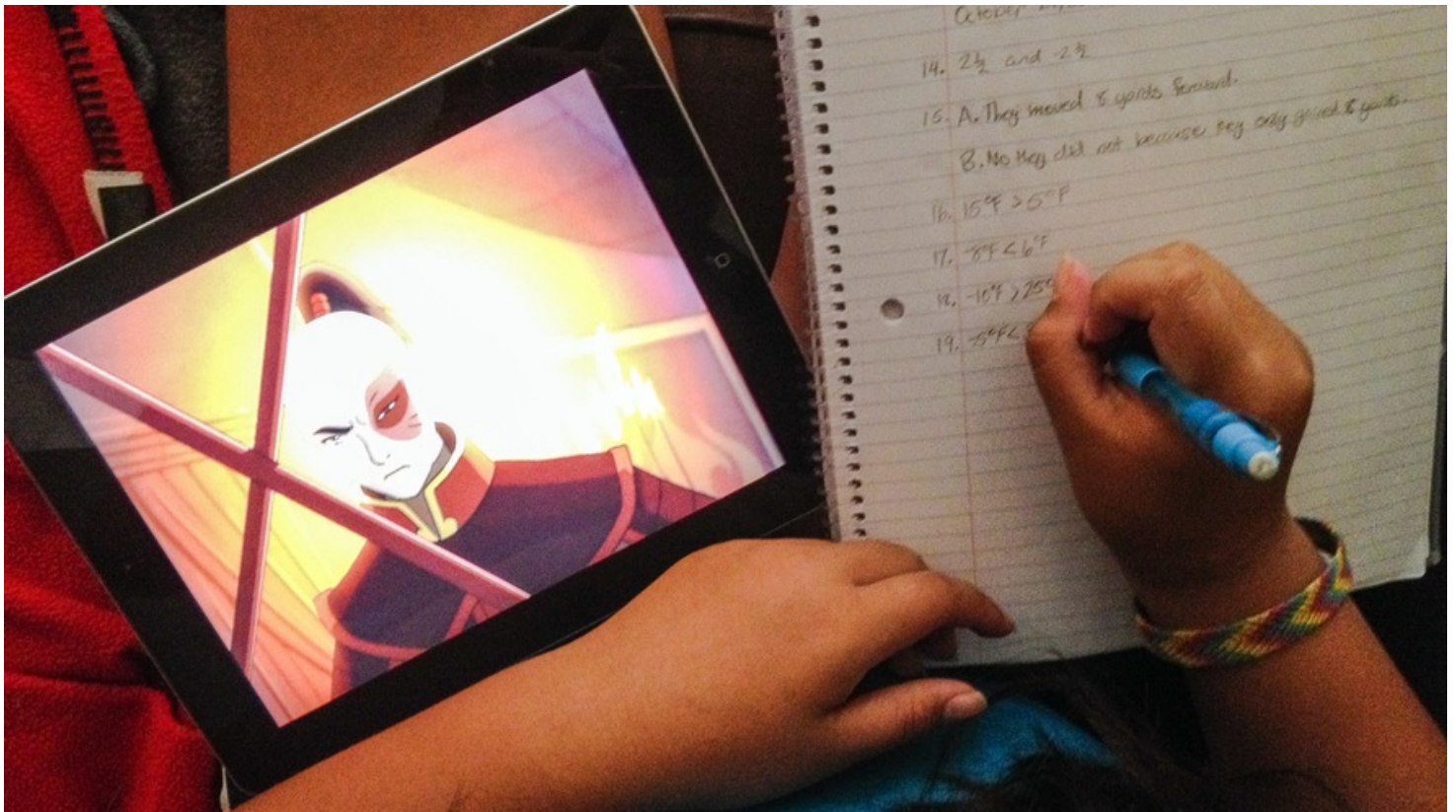# Student Opinion: Are young people too reliant on the Internet?

By Julienne Vicente, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.20.19

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A tween watches "Avatar: The Last Airbender" on her iPad while doing homework. Photo by: Bob Berg/Getty Images

As someone who has grown up hearing, "Figure it out, but don't look it up," I wasn't surprised to learn that this advice is reasonable. I could use this advice when I'm tempted to turn to a search engine for answers. Should all of us limit our use of technology?

Nicholas Carr, the author of "The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains," says that we should take some time away from screens because he believes that the Internet does not improve our intelligence. According to Carr, "Deep thinking, brain scientists have discovered, happens only when our minds are calm and attentive."

Riding The Internet Highway

It is difficult to focus while using the Internet. On top of all the distracting notifications and advertisements, there's also the tendency to start surfing on websites from one topic to another.

I know what it's like to look up a simple question and end up skimming through unrelated information, and some people might not even notice when they start mindlessly scrolling and

clicking. Our digital generation uses the Internet as a second brain.

It's as if the Internet overtakes our thoughts, even when we're not using technology. Matt Richtel wrote an article called, "Attached to Technology and Paying a Price," describing the toll that technology takes on us. He mentions that most computer users switch between tabs and webpages almost every two minutes!

The temptation to know more information creates an impulse to scour through it all, causing our minds to slowly drift away from our main task.

Some might say that sites such as Google have positive effects on their users. While it's true that the Internet gives us answers quickly and reliably, it's not something to get into a habit of doing. It doesn't do much harm to look up some facts every once in a while, but we forget things because we can get the answers so easily.

Quick On The Smartphone Draw

In "Cognitive Offloading: How the Internet is Changing the Human Brain," Philip Perry discusses issues affecting our memory's capacity brought on by search engines. A test was conducted to compare two groups. One group couldn't use any sort of device to answer questions, and the other group was allowed to use Google. The group that had access to their smartphones immediately went to the Internet and didn't even try to answer from memory. The group deprived of devices were quicker overall at answering trivia questions because they didn't reach for their smartphones. Is the Internet diminishing our memory capacity, or just making our brains more reliant on technology?

Everyone knows that the Internet makes problem-solving immensely easier, but is it too easy?

David Price, a guest blogger on a website called techaddiction, says that teaching may be getting easier with Google because parents can now use the Internet to help with their kids' homework. This led me to think about how schools make us memorize facts and equations even though we have apps to solve problems.

Why should people have to remember all that when they could turn to Google instead? We have to at least attempt to use our minds for problem-solving so we don't forget how to do so.

Imagine if you were deprived of smartphones and you completely forgot how to solve problems on your own. If we always turn to calculators and websites for answers, we'll never learn anything on our own.

An example of this reliance on technology is when my class had a math test and we were allowed to use calculators. Most of us used it at every opportunity even though everyone in that room was capable of solving each problem. The Internet is like that because we know the answers to many of the questions we search, but we know we can get the answers and don't want to be wrong.

There are multiple ways to use technology, and perhaps not all of them are negative. Though adults and children use the same type of devices, they use different content.

When looking through an adult's phone, you'll likely find that they use apps such as the calendar, notes, reminders and news articles. When looking through an adolescent or teenager's phone, you'll find that the apps are for messages, games and streaming sites.

I understand that the problems regarding technology are only prominent when it is used in a certain way, but the positives of technology don't cancel out the negatives. We can delete or use fewer of those apps that won't help us improve.

Unplugging Now And Then

I'm convinced that technology is not as detrimental to our productivity as many people say. However, it's not the solution to every problem, and we have to change how we use our devices.

It's time to take a step back from technology, and there are things we can do that help us take a break from our devices, such as reading, drawing or playing sports.

This generation may have been born into a digital world, but we can take small steps to set the next generation up for success, and we can start by teaching them how to use technology productively and responsibly.

Julienne Vicente is an 11-year-old middle schooler who lives in San Diego, California. She uses technology daily. However, she still finds ways to spend her time with her friends and family. And there's always time to read a book or go outside.

Quiz

1   Which characterization does NOT accurately describe the opinion of both the author and Nicholas Carr?

(A)   They both think technology is needed to figure things out.

(B)   They both think technology is detrimental to your productivity when you have to limit it.

(C)   They both think taking a break from the Internet benefits your mind.

(D)   They both think the Internet may hamper a person's intelligence by making it calm and attentive.

2   Which option BEST explains how young people interact with technology?

(A)   They use phone apps in class, and do not learn how to solve problems.

(B)   They rely on it immediately to solve problems, and get easily distracted.

(C)   They rely on it to get information, and spend less time reading texts.

(D)   They use Google for homework, and cannot remember most facts.

3   David Price thinks Google has a positive impact on homework. How does the author respond to his point of view?

(A)   She points out that Internet access can be unreliable.

(B)   She suggests that facts matter less because of apps.

(C)   She stresses the necessity of using your own mind.

(D)   She questions how valuable search engines are.

4   Philip Perry thinks the Internet is negatively affecting our memory. What does the author think about his point of view?

(A)   She thinks the Internet is helping people remember more accurately.

(B)   She thinks the Internet is making it more difficult to remember things.

(C)   She thinks the Internet has changed how we make memories.

(D)   She thinks the Internet is making people less reliant on memory.

Answer Key

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